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SIPDIS

PASS TO NEA/ELA AND PRM/FO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2019

TAGS: PREF EAID PHUM IZ JO

SUBJECT: JORDAN'S INTERIOR MINISTRY EASES UNHCR ACCESS TO IRAQI DETAINEES

REF: AMMAN 460

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The Jordanian Minister of Interior notified UNHCR before he was replaced in a February 23 cabinet reshuffle that the GOJ would ease UNHCR access to all Iraqis detained in Jordan and that the Ministry would order the release of refugees held for overstaying their visas and for working without a permit. The GOJ asked UNHCR not to publicize the new policy, which is signed by outgoing Minister Eid Al-Fayez. The MOI announcement is an encouraging change from past practice.

¶2. (SBU) The text of the Minister's instruction to the head of the Public Security Directorate, Mazen Al-Qadi (who is related to the new Minister of Interior), as translated by UNHCR-Jordan, is quoted as follows:

Excellency, Director of Public Security Directorate

We kindly ask your Excellency to give the following instruction to the relevant departments: Speed up the access procedures for UNHCR staff to asylum seekers and refugees detained at various police stations and the correction and rehabilitation centers. Work on releasing Iraqi detainees, at the various police stations, whose detention is based on violating the residency and labor law if they are not arrested for any judicial or security reasons. Designate an officer to act as liaison officer with the refugee coordinator at the Ministry of Interior to follow up the cases of asylum seekers and refugees.

Signed Eid Al-Fayez, The Minister of Interior.

¶3. (C) Comment: This is the most recent in what UNHCR described as a series of discreet, positive steps taken by the GOJ to improve the lot of Iraqis in Jordan, including the easing of restrictions on some forms of legal migration. UNHCR believes that incoming Minister Nayef Al-Qadi will honor his predecessor's decree. UNHCR and Post were struck by the use of the word "refugee" in the letter; the GOJ has not recognized Iraqis as refugees and refers to them guests. It is unclear whether this too reflects a change in policy and merits careful monitoring.

¶4. (C) Comment continued: Post and UNHCR see improved access to detainees and the release of those held for overstaying and work violations as long overdue and positive. The release of those held for labor law violations is official recognition of the unwritten GOJ policy to tolerate but not approve Iraqis working in Jordan. Until recently, UNHCR protection staff were subjected to a long bureaucratic process before the MOI would permit them to visit MOI detention facilities. When MOI offices detained refugees, the agencies were not diligent in reporting the detention to UNHCR. The designation of a liaison officer will allow UNHCR protection

staff to hold an office accountable to report future detentions in a timely way. End comment.

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